

Friends of Smithills Hall

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Summer 2015

Friends of Smithills Hall Executive Committee

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Welcome

Welcome to summer, and to our summer edition of the Bulletin. Included in this Bulletin are:-

- The Timeline is unveiled. A Supplement is attached
- BafM NW Conference
- An article about the links discovered between Smithills and Ireland in the mid-1800s
- The AGM

John Horrocks Ainsworth and the Irish Connection

By Margaret Koppens

In March 2014 I received a letter from Spiddal, Co. Galway, Eire. It was from a gentleman called Tim Curran, a member of a local history group who had recently come across a limestone slab in the wall of a 'shed' owned by a local farmer. It has the following inscription – *'The Ainsworth School erected by a grant from J.J.C. Ainsworth Esq., of Moss Bank, England 1852'*.

I immediately thought of John Horrocks Ainsworth (JHA) who lived at Moss Bank in 1852, but the initials were wrong. However I replied to Tim and explained this and he sent me a photograph of the stone, (see Page 2) and it was easy to see how the mistake had been made with the 'H' looking like a 'J'.



Once we had established that it was JHA I went to Bolton History Centre (BHC) to look at his diaries. The entry for 8th October 1852 read – ‘Mrs Edmund Ashworth called and told me that she had seen Mrs Bunbury (Mrs B) and also the school she was erecting with the money I sent to her’.



John Horrocks Ainsworth (1800 – 1865)

Now we had an approximate date, so once more I went to BHC, this time to look for copies of JHA’s letters to Mrs B. The above diary entry indicates that JHA had already sent money to Mrs B, but the correspondence begins in January 1854 when JHA asks how

much the building of an Agricultural school will cost and what will be the running expenses for the first year. He points out the difficulty in setting up a school as the Limerick Protestant Society already have a school nearby. In his next letter he sends £100 for the first year’s expenses and a further £50 to purchase a flax machine and wheel barrows. When JHA received the half year accounts in May 1855 he notes that Mrs B has a balance in hand of £27 and he expresses the opinion that a flax mill would be very useful in the neighbourhood and if Mrs B can get the waterwheel, flax machine and building

completed for £100 he will pay for it. By June 1855 JHA has sent a total of £320 towards the school and the flax mill and he hopes that the work can be completed without any further assistance from him.

However in December 1855 in answer to a letter from Mrs B he replies that he is glad to hear of her intention to convert the school house into a residence for the Curate and he enclosed £100 to liquidate the balance of the flax mill and to make any other necessary improvements at the mill, or to use for improvements at the school. He also congratulates Mrs B on her exertions in completing the work and he thinks the warmest thanks of her neighbours are due to her. Mrs B continued to write to him regularly and in a letter dated June 1856 she informs JHA that she is going to construct a lake, to which JHA replies that he thinks it will be a great advantage in the summer season. In December 1856 and June 1857 JHA replies to her letters expressing his delight that the flax mill is a success and expressing the hope that it will be of great benefit to the neighbourhood and declaring his non-intervention in the future of the mill.

The Industrial school and the flax mill were not the only things that JHA helped to establish at Spiddal. In March 1853 he writes in reply to the Rev. J McCredy and enclosed £25 towards the House of Refuge and again in July another £25 to help them over a difficult time.

Tim sent me a booklet written by the Rev McCredy about the poverty and ill-treatment of the Protestant families in this part of Ireland in the 1850’s, they were in desperate circumstances and but for the help of good Christian men like JHA who helped to establish the Refuge, School and Flax Mill, many of them would have perished.

Further entries in JHA’s diaries show that he was a very generous man especially to religious charities.

1851 – ‘Rev. M Elmes from Limerick and another gentleman called upon me for a subscription towards the building of his church and I promised him £5.’

19th April 1852 – ‘Rev. M Stuart, a Presbyterian Minister from Ireland called to get a subscription for repairs to his chapel.’ (Doesn’t say if JHA gave him anything)

18th November 1852 – ‘Mr George O’Neil, Secretary to the Irish School Society called at Moss Bank and left two or three pamphlets on the subject of the Society. Conversed with him for some time and found him a pleasant, intelligent man.’

Closer to home JHA paid for the erection of St Paul’s Church and school on Halliwell Road and the houses which surround it. He also donated money for the building of St Peter’s Church, Church Road. All his life he was interested in education and he became a governor of Bolton Grammar School (later Bolton School) where he took a very active role. He built many of the stone houses for his workers at the



Flax Mill today

Bleachworks, which are still a feature of Halliwell to-day.

Tim had found my address from the Halliwell LHS website

and after his first letter, emails and letters went back and forth over the following months. Tim also sent me a lot of photographs including one of the school and the flax mill built with JHA’s money. The school was a guest house for many years and like the flax mill is now also a private house. The old Manor House belonging to the Bunbury family has now been demolished.

According to Tim this story has fired the interest of their local history society and they are hoping

to do more research on the area. They have no idea why the stone was found at the top of a hill, far away from where it was originally installed. The Bunbury’s no longer live locally and Tim is trying to get a meeting with a descendant

in Co. Tipperary. Friends of Tim own property whose boundary wall is the dam built to make the lake mentioned above and they had no idea of the history behind it. The river that supplied the flax mill and the lake also runs through their property. So now the locals are becoming interested in what is coming to light. Tim has also found another stone with the words ‘Jehovah Jireh’ engraved upon it; this one had been thrown in a corner when the House of Refuge was demolished about 20 years ago. He has now had it re-instated in the boundary wall which surrounded the site.

So the Ainsworths, Moss Bank House and Smithills Hall have a connection to a little village in Ireland on the shores of the beautiful Galway Bay.

John Horrocks Ainsworth copied the letters he wrote into books which can be found, along with his diaries in the Ainsworth papers at Bolton History Centre.

Bafm NW Conference 2015

This Conference, for representatives of Friends of Museums in the North West of England, was held at the Atkinson, Southport on Saturday 18th April 2015. Attending from the Friends of Smithills Hall were David Williams, Chairman and Margaret Koppens, Secretary. Also in attendance was



Bernard Rostron who recently ceased to be the NW Co-ordinator and who has taken up the role of national chairman (pictured with Margaret Koppens).

The programme included speakers from the Atkinson talking

about the Sefton coast; the Wedgwood Museum on collections and collecting; Manchester Museum on collecting and creating ancient Egypt in the North West, and an artist from Southport.

The event provided the opportunity to have guided tours of the Atkinson Museum and the Picture Storeroom.

Members can find out more about Bafm and its support for Friends organisations on their website at www.bafm.org.uk.

The new BafM co-ordinator for the NW was introduced. He is Michael Brightman, Chairman of the Friends of Marsh Mill.

New Mayor of Bolton (2015 – 2016)



The Friends are delighted to offer our congratulations to the new Mayor of Bolton Mrs Carole Swarbrick, who is a member of the Friends of Smithills Hall. Jaleh Hayes, the wife of fellow councillor Roger Hayes, will be Mayoress.

Mrs Swarbrick became a local councillor as she grew up with political debate and in a political family. Her father was a Conservative and her mother's family were socialist miners. As an economics student she joined the Liberal party and was involved in the debates, during the 1970's, around joining the EEC. She is a

Councillor for the Smithills ward of Bolton. Cllr Swarbrick worked as a teacher and has spent most of her career teaching in special education. She is a school governor of Church Road and Ladywood schools, Bolton.

The Mayor will be attending the July Garden Party (more in the next Bulletin).

Volunteers Week 1-7 June 2015

Bolton Libraries and Museum Services, as part of the Volunteers Week, and as a way of saying thank you for their support and hard work, invited volunteers from across the Borough (including those from the Friends) to an afternoon tea at Smithills Hall. Friends of Smithills Hall guides provided special tours of the Hall.

Annual General Meeting 2015

The 26th Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 17th June at Smithills Hall. Officers, Committee and accounts were confirmed. Our



Sir William & Stephanie Goring

President Sir William Goring and his wife Stephanie made the long journey from W Sussex to attend. Their presence was much appreciated. The speaker was Brian Allanson, who as a former Bolton Mayor welcomed the Queen when she visited Bolton in 1988.

He gave a humorous and very vivid account of the preparations for the event and what happened on the day.